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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights conducted the Mexican American Education Study between 1969 and 1974. Drawn from the published and unpublished findings of this study, this report discusses the education of Mexican Americans in the 5 Southwestern states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas, where about 85 percent of all Chicanos live. Additional material was obtained from interviews with students, parents, and educators throughout the Southwest. Topics discussed are: (1) the first day of school for a Chicano; (2) what students feel; (3) what teachers expect of Chicanos; (4) what schools are doing; and (5) bilingual/bicultural education. The report of the Mexican American Study are listed. (NQ)

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PARA LOS NIÑOS — FOR THE CHILDREN

IMPROVING EDUCATION FOR MEXICAN AMERICANS

Clearinghouse Publication 47 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
October 1974

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Mural in East Los Angeles (See Prologue)

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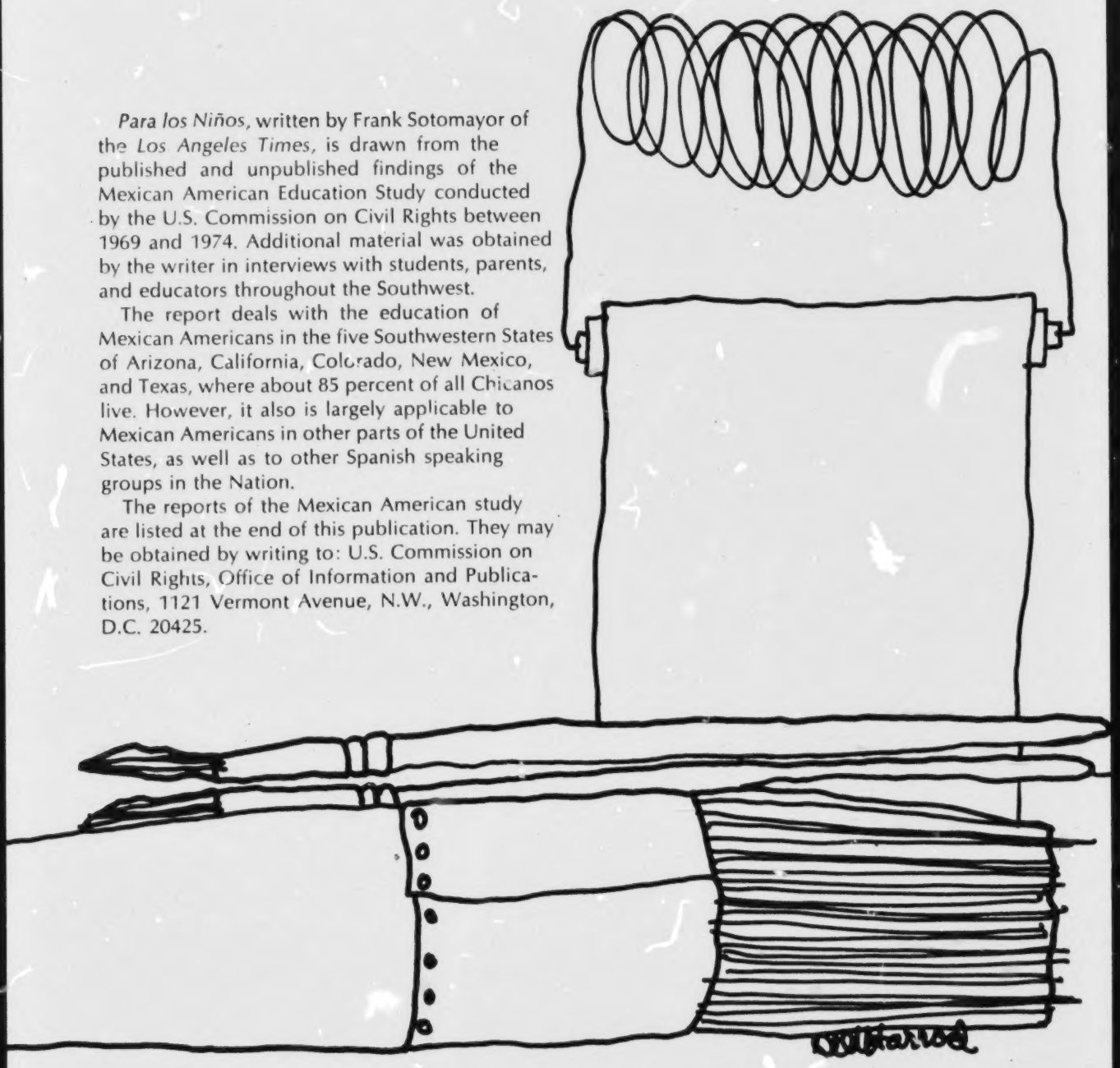
Para los Niños, written by Frank Sotomayor of the *Los Angeles Times*, is drawn from the published and unpublished findings of the Mexican American Education Study conducted by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights between 1969 and 1974. Additional material was obtained by the writer in interviews with students, parents, and educators throughout the Southwest.

The report deals with the education of Mexican Americans in the five Southwestern States of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas, where about 85 percent of all Chicanos live. However, it also is largely applicable to Mexican Americans in other parts of the United States, as well as to other Spanish speaking groups in the Nation.

The reports of the Mexican American study are listed at the end of this publication. They may be obtained by writing to: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Office of Information and Publications, 1121 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20425.



Prologue: The Writing on the Wall

A young Chicano artist dips his brush into a bucket of black paint and with a careful touch outlines the brown faces in his mural.

An old couple pauses on the sidewalk to admire the colorful scene taking form on the wall of a grocery store in East Los Ángeles. "¿Qué significa?" the woman asks, and the artist, Antonio Rito Ortega, walks over to explain his representation of life in the barrio.

The central area of the mural is dominated by the towering figure of a Mexican American student in graduation cap and gown holding a diploma. The student's upper body rises from the trunk of the tree of knowledge, dropping seeds of learning on the community below. "It signifies the importance of education in our lives," Ortega says in Spanish.

Yet there is something incomplete. Instead of eyes, a nose, and mouth, the artist has covered the student's face with a large question mark. That, he says, indicates the uncertainty awaiting the Chicano student in school and the question of whether he actually will receive the diploma.

Just as the question mark clouds the educational fate of the student in the mural, it also hangs over the heads of countless other Mexican Americans in the Southwest.

"My mural asks the Chicano community, 'Will our children receive the education they need?'" the artist says.

The old woman nods in understanding. "Queremos lo mejor para los niños," she states. "We want the best for the children."

"Sí," her husband agrees, repeating a phrase heard often in Spanish speaking families, "para los ñinos."

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THE FIRST DAY

In a Mexican American neighborhood in a Southwestern city, a young mother leaves the kitchen where she is preparing breakfast, goes to the front bedroom, and wakes her daughter for the first day of school.

"Levántate hija. Es el primer día de escuela y no quiero que llegues tarde."

That morning, as Mrs. López helps Elena put on a new blue dress and brushes the child's long black hair, many thoughts go through her mind. Thoughts of how her daughter will be guided by a considerate teacher . . . of the schoolfriends Elena will make . . . of how she will miss her little girl being around during the day.

At the door Mrs. Lopez gives Elena a lunch and a few words of advice in Spanish. "Be careful crossing the streets. And listen carefully to your teacher. She will teach you many important things."

Then she watches proudly as Elena greets Rafael and María and all three head down the street toward Rio School, the neighborhood elementary school.

At the same time Sally Ross is on the freeway driving toward Rio Elementary School. It will be Sally's first day of teaching, but she isn't a bit nervous. She was an honor student at the university and is confident that she got all the proper training and preparation.

She has met with the principal and the other teachers at the school and they look like a good group. The only thing that bothered her was some of the teachers' curious pieces of advice, such as "You can't hold these students to high standards; they just can't make it." One male teacher even referred to the students at the school as "animals" and "dirty Mexicans."

Well, that hardly matters now, Sally thinks. They won't have anything to do with her class. These will be *her* students. She's sure she's not biased against Mexican Americans, who make up 80 percent of the school's enrollment and she looks on her assignment as an interesting challenge.

As 22-year-old Sally drives into the school's parking area, she thinks about how good it will feel finally to be in that first-grade classroom, teaching her very first class after 4 years of college and the long summer months of waiting for this September day.

The playground at Rio School is busy with vibrant children talking, laughing, and running. Elena and her friends, excited and happy, walk past the other children into the school. Arriving at the first-grade classroom, Elena smiles shyly when she sees her teacher.

As soon as the class session begins, Elena knows that something is wrong. The teacher, Miss Ross, is talking but Elena cannot understand her.

She watches Miss Ross go around the room greeting the 6-year-old pupils. Coming to Elena, she asks, "What's your name?"

Elena looks back, puzzled. But her friend Rafael understands and whispers to her, "¿Cómo te llamas?"

"Oh, no, Ralph," the teacher interrupts, "you must speak English in school." She repeats to Elena, "What's your name? Don't you understand English?"

Finally, the child utters, "Elena."

"OK," the teacher says. "We will call you Ellen."

Sally Ross goes back to her desk and jots down some names. "I'd better do something right

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away about the children with a language handicap," Sally thinks to herself. She quickly orders the six children who seemed not to understand English to take the front seats next to her desk so she can watch their work closely.

Elena hears her name called and in confusion looks at Rafael. He motions for her to move to the front seat and then avoids her eyes.

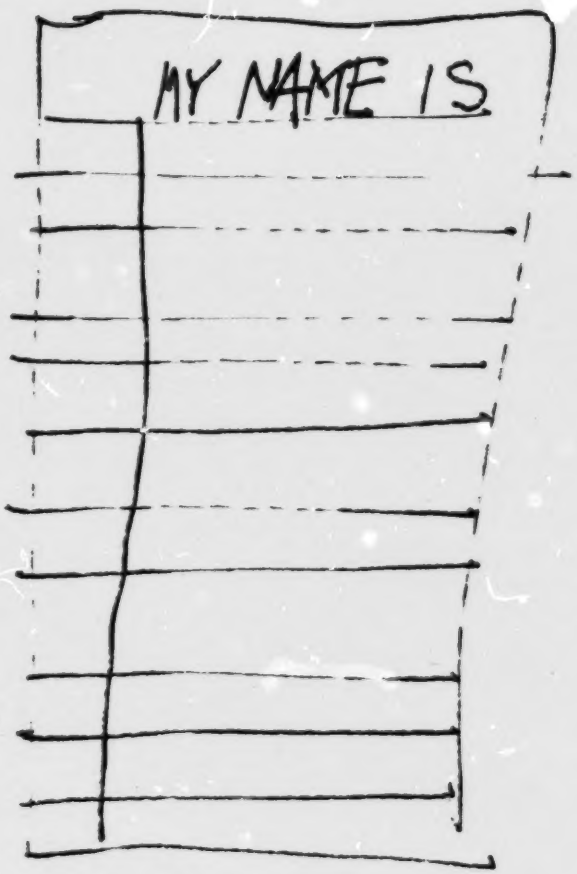
Hurriedly, Elena takes her new place.

The teacher turns confidently and begins distributing supplies to the class. But Elena, shaken by the rush of events of the last few moments, is not watching. "¿Por qué no habla como mi mamá?" she wonders.

For Elena López, the first day of school is the beginning of a bewildering and painful experience. Suddenly, with the mere ring of a school bell, she is expected to speak English. Spanish, the language of her parents, her brothers, sisters, and friends, is prohibited.

She has heard English on television but has had little opportunity to use the words she learned. Now, with the closing of the classroom door, the Spanish language has become useless for Elena. So when the teacher asks her a question that she doesn't understand and all the children stare, she feels very lonely and sad inside and wants to run and hide somewhere.

"I can't understand the teacher," Elena thinks. "No le entiendo."



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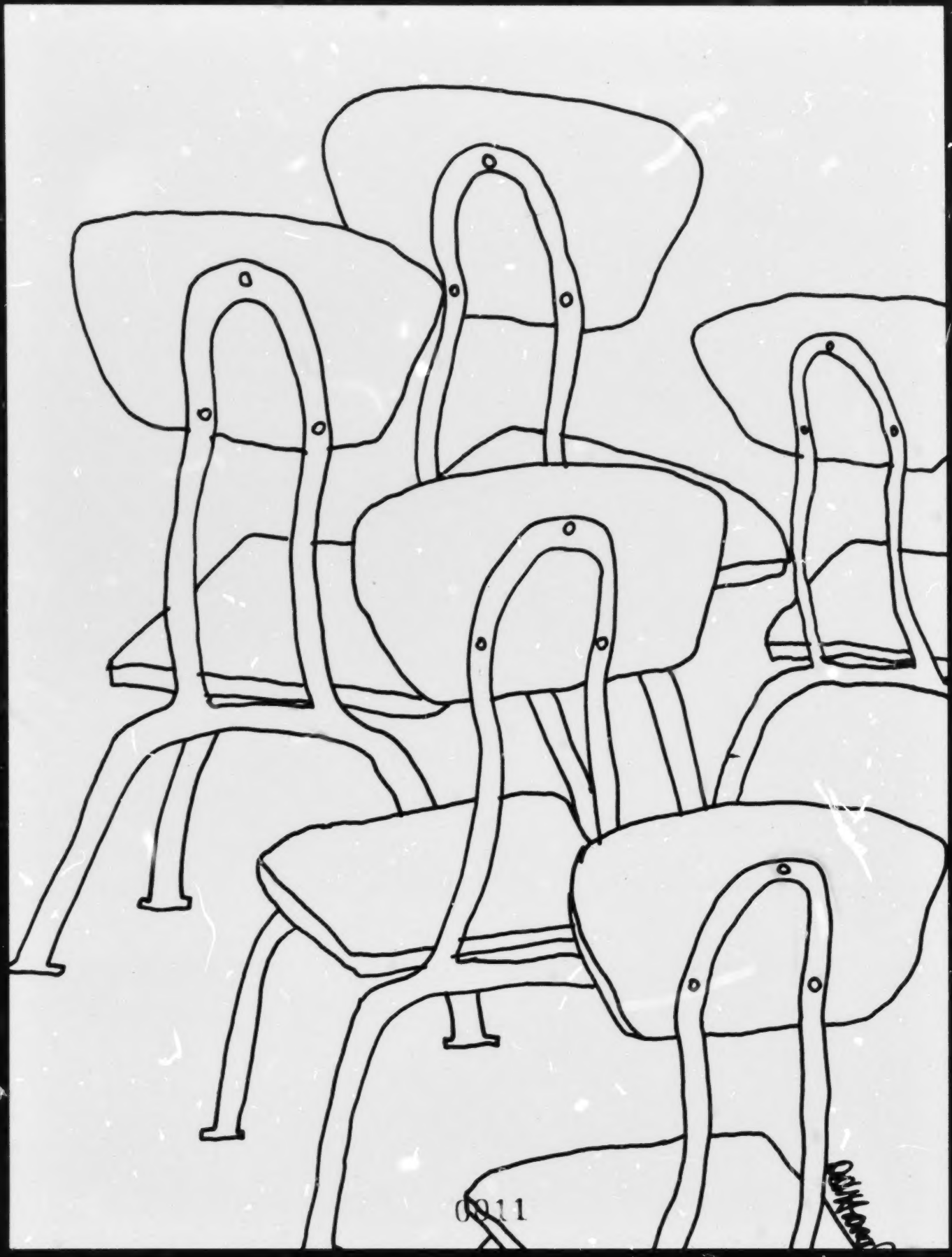

WHAT STUDENTS FEEL

Parent. Teacher. Child. Each gives and receives from the educational experience. A parent watches a child grow, question, and learn. A teacher with skill imparts knowledge to her class. A youngster in the classroom accepts and responds to words, books, instructions, and attitudes. It is a universal exchange, unless obstacles are placed in the way, unless the two-way street of learning—the giving and the taking—is blocked by school-made barriers that damage the student's spirit and deaden the mind.

For many of the 1.6 million Mexican American students in the Southwest, such barriers are painfully real and seemingly unavoidable. And too often, too many of these young people give up and drop out.

The statistics are shocking. Each year tens of thousands of Mexican Americans end their schooling prematurely. Four out of every 10 Chicano students do not graduate from high school. In comparison, 9 out of every 10 Anglo students do finish high school. These are people, not numbers—people who are branded as failures early in life at something that society values highly.

But are the children the failures? Or has the educational system failed them?

Mexican American parents and many educational experts believe it is the schools that have set up the pattern leading to failure, leaving only the luckiest and most adaptable to survive. They are alarmed that generally Mexican American children do less well than their Anglo classmates in school and score lower on reading and other achievement tests.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, after a 5-year study of schools in the Southwest, found "a systematic failure of the educational process, which not only ignores the educational needs of Chicano students, but suppresses their culture and stifles their hopes and ambitions."

The Commission's Mexican American Education Study was the most comprehensive of its type ever conducted. It documented with facts and figures what Chicanos long have known—that Mexican Americans are being denied equal educational opportunity in the schools.

The complex process of school failure starts when the child enters the first grade.

From the beginning, many Mexican American school children are made to feel that they have some things that are not wanted—the wrong language, an accent, a different lifestyle and culture. They know they lack some things that *are* wanted—the right language, the right background, a Dick and Jane house, and Pilgrim ancestors.

About half of the Chicanos starting school do not have a working knowledge of English. People in this situation, such as Elena López, perhaps face the toughest time in school systems that make no provisions for non-English-speaking youngsters. For them it is sink or swim.

Yet speaking English doesn't remove all the barriers.

Even for those Chicano students whose families have lived in the Southwest for generations and who speak English as well as Anglos, the school-made barriers are great. They also find that they are often overlooked in class, are advised by counselors to take auto shop instead of college prep courses "because they might find them too

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difficult," or have to listen in history class about the settling of the Southwest by courageous Texans and stalwart Easterners.

These students and those like Elena López all know that something is wrong.

Listen to them.

"Where I come from everybody speaks Spanish and that's all you know, Spanish," says a 16-year-old Texas student. "And when you are 6 years old, all of a sudden they put you in this Anglo school and it's English right away, but nobody knows how to speak English. Then they try to counteract this by forbidding you to speak Spanish. 'Spanish is bad, Spanish is bad.' When I was little I had the idea Spanish was a dirty language and I felt kind of rotten."

A Tucson teenager recalls that in elementary school "The houses in the Dick and Jane readers didn't look anything like mine. I wondered if there was something wrong with my house. And often, the things teachers discussed had no meaning in my life, but I tried to pretend they did. Teachers were always talking about getting a good breakfast—orange juice, cereal, milk, bacon, and eggs. But these foods didn't mean anything to me. Our family had tortillas with beans and cheese or chorizo."

A young Chicano in a Texas school says, "I remember phrases from my history book such as 'Santa Anna knew that he was dealing with a superior class of men.' It is phrases like that that stay in your head until it gets to your subconscious. 'A superior class of men.' What am I—inferior or something?"

"When I was going to elementary school in Anglo middle-class West Los Angeles, there were only seven or eight Mexican Americans in the whole school," says Rachel, 21, a university student. "I spoke English, but they laughed and ridiculed me for my pronunciation of church, chair, ship. They laughed when I brought burritos for lunch, so I quit doing that. I was very uptight about what I did. I wanted to fit in.

"Then I went to live in the East Side barrio and found that many of the teachers didn't expect students there to do anything. It used to upset me to hear a teacher say, 'If I were in another school, I'd be expected to teach such and such, but not here.' The teacher was telling us in so many words that we weren't as good as students in other parts of the city.

"When I was in high school, I told my counselor I wanted to go to college, but she said, 'Don't try to achieve that. It's not for you. Instead, why don't you try secretarial studies?'

"So I took secretarial studies, but still I wanted to go to college. I went to junior college for 2 years to try it. And then I went on to Cal. State L.A. I'll graduate this year."

Roberto, a 20-year-old university student, says he can't forget that in his last year at a South Texas high school, "We wanted a Mexican American club on campus and Mexican American teachers, counselors, and books on Chicanos. But we ran into all kinds of trouble. We tried but couldn't get anywhere with the principal, so we went to the district office. They told us to come back 'mañana' and later a bunch of us got arrested. They said we were 'parading without

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a permit.' Eventually they did hire one Chicano counselor, but things were pretty much the same. We were labeled 'rabble rousers' and 'Communists.' I can't understand it. Why do they want to destroy our language and culture?"

These young Chicano students are frustrated and angry to find that their education is not a challenge, but a battle with the odds stacked against them. It is not enough to ask anymore why Chicano students don't learn. But what should be asked is why teachers do not teach and why schools do not care.

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WHAT TEACHERS EXPECT

San Jose was hot and muggy that day. In one of the largest high schools in the city, an Anglo teacher, in her mid-forties and smartly dressed, walked slowly down the hall to her next class. She seemed surprised and a bit flattered to be greeted by a visitor at the classroom door who wanted to sit in on her history class, which was filled with mostly male Chicano students.

The teacher agreed, but turned to the visitor apologetically and said, "Don't expect very much from these students. This is my slow class."

Asked for an explanation, she replied quietly, "We consider these students low achievers. You should really visit one of my high ability classes."

It would be nice if every classroom were filled with eager young minds, just as it would be nice if every teacher who walks into a classroom were filled with excitement and zeal for teaching. It would also be nice if teachers greeting a class of Chicano children would expect them to be as interested, studious, and ambitious as a class of Anglo students. But too often they do not.

One teacher who works in a predominantly Mexican American school expressed it this way: "I am a good teacher, I think. If I had a normal bunch of kids, I could teach. But this certainly is not a normal bunch of kids."

The heart of the educational experience, the give-and-take between teacher and student, can be damaged seriously when a student senses that the teacher is displeased or disinterested in his or her work.

It is not difficult, then, to understand why Chicano students become discouraged. A Civil Rights Commission study showed that teachers gave praise or encouragement to Anglo students 36 percent more often than to Mexican Americans. They directed questions to Anglos 21 percent more frequently than to Chicanos and accepted and used the ideas and responses of Anglo students 40 percent more often than those of Chicanos.

The study found that Mexican American students receive less overall attention than Anglos from teachers and, not surprisingly, that Chicanos participate less in class. The total picture that emerged from the survey was that Mexican American students often are ignored in the classroom.

Commission staff members observed these examples of educational neglect:

> In a San Antonio schoolroom one Chicano sat in the back and volunteered several answers. At one point the teacher did not even acknowledge his answer. At another time he volunteered an answer which was perfectly suitable. Yet the teacher stated: "Well yes, uh huh, but can anyone else put it in different terms?" The teacher then called on an Anglo boy who gave the same basic response with very little rephrasing. The teacher then beamed and exclaimed: "Yes, that's it exactly."

> In a Phoenix classroom, several Chicanos kept raising their hands eagerly at every question. Mrs. G. repeatedly looked over their heads and called on some of the same Anglo students over and over. In some cases, she called on the Chicanos only because the Anglos were not raising their hands. After a while, the Mexican Americans stopped raising their hands.

Any progressive program in Southwestern schools aimed at opening the door to better education for Mexican American students will have to look to its teachers. They hold the key.

"You're doing a report on Mexican American

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education?" a teacher at predominantly Chicano Lincoln High School in Los Angeles asked. "Well, don't blame the poor teachers. We have enough problems."

Blaming the teachers is not the issue. Training them properly is.

Training programs that erase erroneous ideas about Mexican Americans, teach Spanish, present an accurate picture of Chicano family life, and reveal the rich Mexican American heritage will do much to remove the "cultural handicaps" of teachers and student teachers and help them respond better to Chicano children.

But this training is not being provided.

Few colleges and universities require any ethnic studies or Spanish courses as part of their teacher training programs.

Even the required education courses make little mention of situations and cases that might affect the teaching of Mexican Americans and other minority group students. One teacher remembers that "The only discussion of minorities in our college education classes was in a very general way when professors would point out that 'the problems of hunger and housing have to be solved before we can teach these low-income people anything.' "

And, finally, since most student teachers do their practice teaching in schools where the majority of the students are Anglos, they are basically unprepared when assigned to schools with heavy Chicano enrollments.

Only one Southwestern State, California, has officially recognized the need for this type of preparation. Under recently enacted legislation known as the Ryan Act, student teachers must have some teaching experience with minority children before they can receive their State certification. This law will go into effect in the 1974–75 school year. It is a hopeful sign for the future, but it comes too late for those teachers who already deal with thousands of Chicano students daily.

Linda, 26, is in her third year teaching in a predominantly Chicano school in central Los Angeles. She says that she had no special training in college for teaching Mexican Americans and other ethnic groups even though her college was located in a Mexican American area.

"I just wasn't prepared to teach Mexican Americans," she said. "I took Spanish on my own because I figured I probably would have Chicano children in my classes at some time. It helped me out because I have had many students who didn't speak English."

Linda was told this year that her first graders would be "slow learners" judged by their work in kindergarten. "But I've held them to high standards and they do excellent work," she said, beaming.

"My neighbor is also a teacher in this school but she criticizes her students, calling them 'my monsters.' If she doesn't have any respect for them, I don't know how she expects them to learn."

Linda added that she stills feels there are "gaps in my knowledge about Mexican Americans. I would like to know more about my students' culture and homelife."

She described a telling incident with one of her 6-year-old students. "They were drawing pictures and I asked them to draw one showing the people in their family. I noticed Carlos had about 12 figures in his picture. I laughed at first and told him, 'No just draw your family.' He told me, 'This is my family.' He then pointed out favorite

cousins, his grandparents, aunts and uncles whom he was close to. They were all 'his family.' He taught me something.'

Linda is one of many teachers who could benefit from some practical programs on teaching minority students. Effective "in-service" training courses for experienced teachers can open their minds to various aspects of Chicano values and culture, giving them higher expectations and new respect for Mexican American children.

A change in teacher attitudes was demonstrated in one training course when teachers were asked about the statement, "There is an absence of educational tradition in Mexican American families." At the beginning of the course almost all teachers agreed with the statement. Following discussions with parents, interviews, and research on the subject, the teachers at the end of the course reversed their opinions and disagreed with the statement. They had found through personal contact with the parents that there was a traditional emphasis on education in Chicano families. Attitudes had been changed. Minds had been opened.

Programs that provide training in Spanish and courses that deal with Chicano culture and history are just as vital for counselors as for teachers. The Commission found, however, that none of the Southwestern States has established requirements for cross-cultural courses that would help counselors in their work with Chicano youngsters. As is the case with teachers, few counselor trainees have an opportunity to work with Chicano students.

Understanding breeds sensitivity, but lack of awareness encourages stereotyped thinking. There are thousands of examples of Chicano students who have been shunted off to vocational courses because counselors have not thought of them as "smart enough to go on to college."

Rita is only one case.

"I want to attend college and become a teacher, but I've been taking business courses because of my counselor," says Rita, a California high school student. "He kept telling me that I didn't know anything. I think he thought he was doing it for my own good, but he could have looked into the matter a little more and tried to help. My grades are good. I could pass those college prep classes just as well as anybody else."

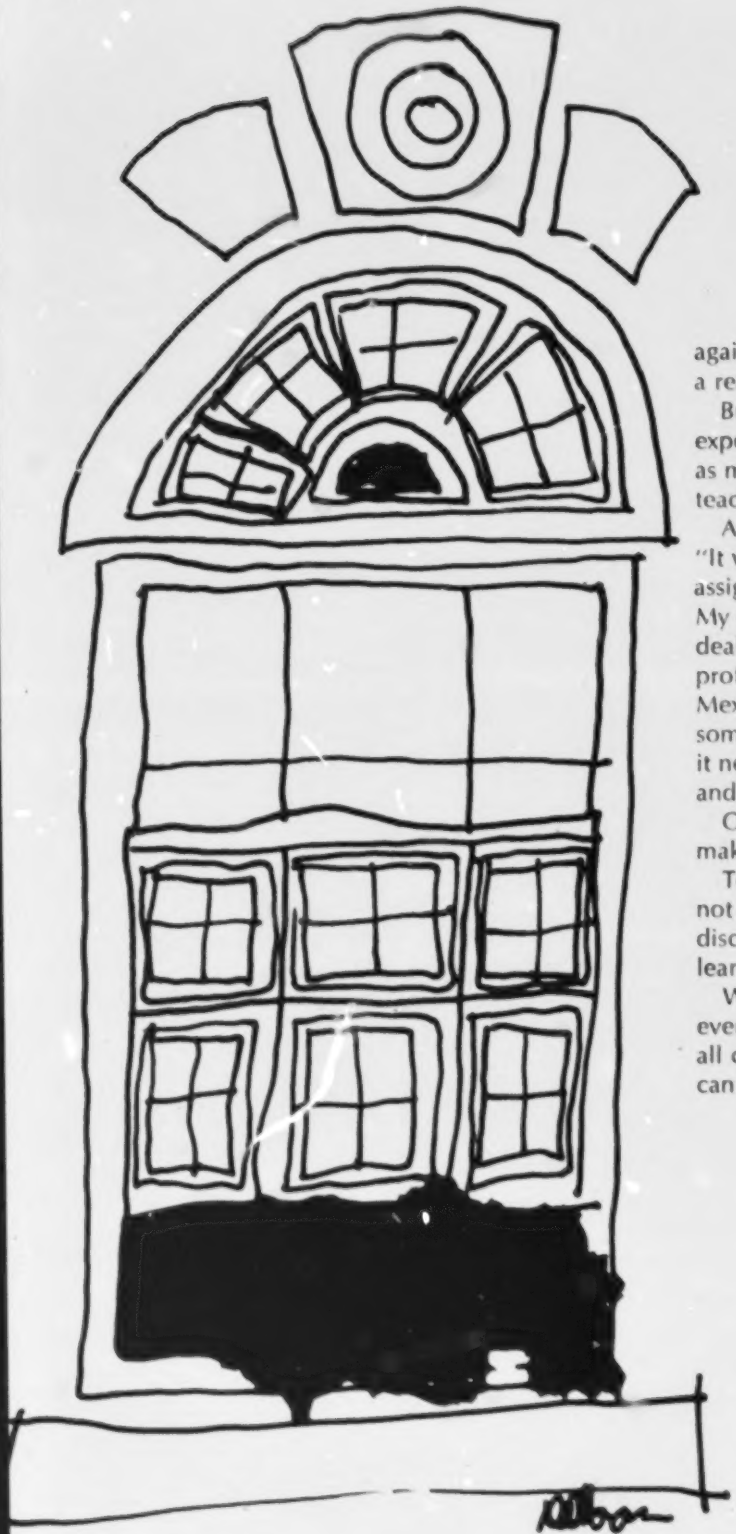
Advising Rita, who had the potential and the interest to be a teacher, to seek another career disregards not only the student's ambitions but the critical need for Chicano teachers in the Southwest.

In the last several years, waves of protest by students and parents in Southwestern schools have focused on the lack of Mexican American teachers. Although Chicanos have begun to fill a few school positions, the Commission estimated that in 1972 less than 5 percent of the 350,000 teachers in the Southwest were Mexican American.

Plainly, Rita is needed.

Chicano teachers and counselors can smoothly bridge the gap between home and school for Chicano children. A Mexican American teacher is more likely to have an understanding of the language and cultural needs of Mexican American children. Chicano students also would find it easier to identify with a Mexican American teacher, which would strengthen the bonds of communication and the students' desire to learn.

If more students like Rita are encouraged to become teachers, instead of being advised



against it, Chicano teachers will be not a rarity but a reality in the Southwest.

But Mexican Americans need training and experience in teaching minority group children as much as non-Chicano teachers and student teachers.

A Chicano teacher in San Diego explained, "It was a traumatic experience when I was assigned to teach at a Mexican American school. My college training had given me no skills in dealing with my own ethnic group. In college, professors implied that the language of Mexican Americans was a handicap. It took me some time to see the real situation. At first it never dawned on me to look at the linguistic and cultural richness of the Chicano children."

Opening avenues of understanding can make a difference.

Teachers and counselors who are informed and not misinformed, who encourage and not discourage, can influence Chicano children to learn, to achieve, and to excel.

When teachers have high expectations for every student, a classroom can be a place where all children, including the culturally different, can be considered a "normal bunch."

WHAT SCHOOLS ARE DOING

There are varying opinions among principals and school officials about what, if anything, should be done to give Mexican Americans an even break at education.

Some believe no problem exists. "We treat all our students alike," one Arizona principal said. "They are all the same to us."

Others recognize that Chicanos as a group do not perform as well as Anglo students. But they place the blame on the students or their parents. Thus, principals who responded to a Commission question about the high Chicano dropout rate commented:

"It's primarily an economic problem. Kids quit school in order to work."

"They are handicapped by the lack of importance given to education by their parents."

"It is not the fault of the school. I have never seen a school that discriminates against Latins."

"I think it is a social problem rather than an educational one."

A third group of educators admits candidly that the shortcomings of the schools are causing Mexican American students to drop out. Typical reasons were:

"Schools have pushed kids out because they have not offered the right programs."

"Here in Texas, I attribute it to our educational procedures. We have not adequately met the needs of Mexican American students."

"Our curriculums are not meaningful to Mexican Americans. No attempt is made to teach early Southwestern history. The Mexican American child feels he has no place in our society."

"There is a need for Chicano teachers and counselors."

"The schools create conflict in the students. In the past we tried to 'Anglocize' them. That was a mistake. I feel that the damage is done in the early years."

The opinions of principals and school officials are in, but they don't mean very much if you are 9 years old and can't read, or if you are 16 and just want to drop out and forget school.

Relevant school programs to insure better education for Chicano children are badly needed, but those in existence are few and far between.

Some schools are trying. They are taking a new look at the subjects they teach, adding courses on Chicano heritage, trying to recruit more Chicano teachers and counselors, putting more Mexican American aides in the classroom, and attempting to start bilingual programs.

But most schools are doing nothing—or, worse yet, continuing practices that practically condemn Chicano children to failure. One of the worst of these is ability grouping.

Grouping of students according to their abilities is done by schools "in the best interests of students," so they won't have to compete with children who are "out of their league." But this backfires.

In practice, ability grouping separates students from their friends and creates in them a false sense of their worth. Students in lower groups tend to feel and behave like failures, while those in upper groups may think of themselves as superior.

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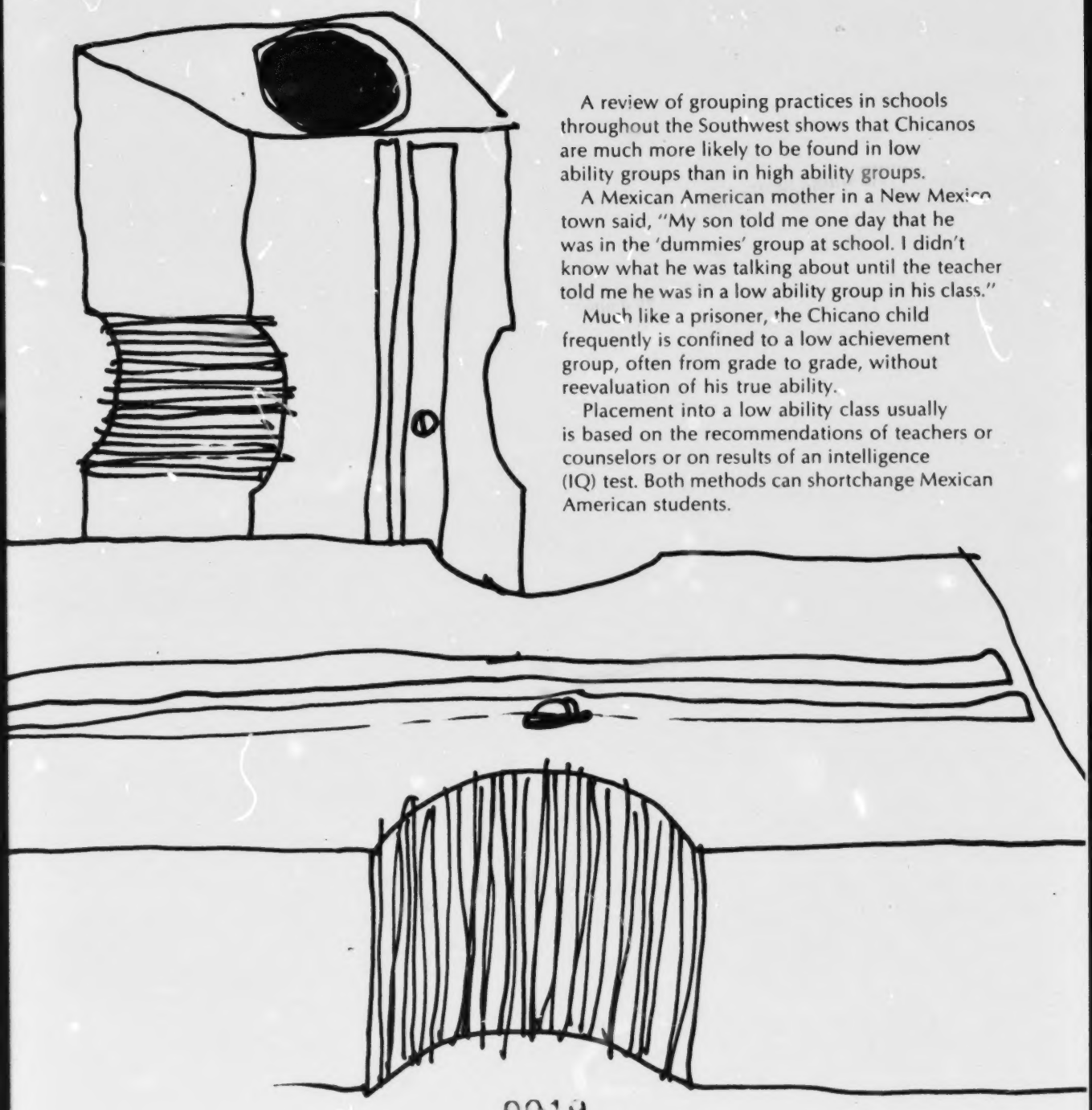

A review of grouping practices in schools throughout the Southwest shows that Chicanos are much more likely to be found in low ability groups than in high ability groups.

A Mexican American mother in a New Mexico town said, "My son told me one day that he was in the 'dummies' group at school. I didn't know what he was talking about until the teacher told me he was in a low ability group in his class."

Much like a prisoner, the Chicano child frequently is confined to a low achievement group, often from grade to grade, without reevaluation of his true ability.

Placement into a low ability class usually is based on the recommendations of teachers or counselors or on results of an intelligence (IQ) test. Both methods can shortchange Mexican American students.

Teachers and counselors who easily "track" Chicanos into slow groups quickly deny that they do so because they believe Mexican Americans are intellectually inferior. Of course not. They try to be more reasonable. Chicano children are "culturally deprived" or "emotionally immature," they say.

And then there are those educators who feel that bright Mexican American students shouldn't be in "honors" or high ability classes because they "might not be comfortable."

In other cases, the IQ test—that neat, precise package of questions, black on white—can spell failure for Mexican Americans. The test is supposed to measure a child's intelligence. But, since the test is designed for middle-class Anglo students, Chicanos are placed at a disadvantage. It becomes a test of language ability.

"Many Mexican Americans score low because they haven't mastered English," says Dr. Steve G. Moreno of California State University, San Diego, an authority on IQ testing.

The unfairness of IQ tests is widely acknowledged by educators, as evidenced by these statements made by principals to the Commission:

"IQ testing is not a true evaluation of a child's intellect. It is an outdated measure and should be declared obsolete."

"IQ tests are really language tests. Many Chicanos don't know the names of items on tests. They find it difficult to follow the instructions in English."

"IQ tests should not be used—not even for Anglos."

Some schools and school districts have discontinued IQ testing, especially in the early grades, at the urging of parents and committed educators. Yet, the testing continues at many Southwestern schools, affecting the lives of thousands of children.

Mexican American parents, students, and educational reformers are turning increasing attention to the school curriculum, the basic plan for a child's schooling that includes courses, textbooks, and teaching methods.

It is in the daily classroom routine that the Chicano student's language is suppressed and his culture and heritage are ignored or distorted Many schools still stress "don't speak Spanish" as the cure-all to the "language problem." Only about 4 percent of the elementary schools and about 7 percent of the secondary schools offer courses in Mexican American history. Chicano home experiences and interests are not considered as having anything to do with the curriculum.

Mexican Americans dream of using the school's curriculum to open up the two-way street of learning, to give Chicano culture a place in all subjects from reading to history and to make Spanish not a stumbling block but a stepping stone to better use of English.

Bilingual-bicultural education is considered by many persons to be the best vehicle to make this dream a reality. But it is being approached cautiously. Where given a chance, however, bilingual-bicultural education is showing that Mexican American students can learn, and learn well, with dignity and purpose. A look at an effective bilingual classroom best illustrates that.

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SE HABLA INGLES Y ESPAÑOL

A Mexican American third grader in a bilingual classroom in Los Angeles is reading to her classmates from the book, *Harriet the Spy*.

"Thank you, that was very good," the teacher says. "Now would you read from this one?"

"Había una vez un gusanito que vivía . . ." the student begins. It is immediately evident that the pupil is equally at ease in reading either English or Spanish. She reads effectively, with understanding, emphasis, and feeling.

The bilingual reading exercise at this school is a dramatic event because as recently as 5 years ago it was against the law to use Spanish as the language of instruction in California, as well as in some other Southwestern States. Now, bilingual-bicultural programs especially developed for Mexican Americans are a reality in a few selected schools and classrooms.

The results are encouraging. To a classroom observer, the students appear self-assured, enthusiastic, and involved. One pupil may ask a classmate a question in Spanish and receive an answer in English, or vice versa. It is all very natural—as natural as the students' home and neighborhood surroundings where varying degrees of bilingualism are a way of life.

In the last several years, this use of both English and Spanish in teaching has come to the classrooms of a small number of schools in the Southwest—a number much too small, its supporters believe. Across the Nation, a scattering of other minority group members also are beginning to reap the rewards of bilingual education. In addition to programs for Spanish speakers, federally-funded bilingual projects are in operation in 18 languages for such groups as Chinese Americans in California, Native Americans on reservations, French Americans in Louisiana, and Portuguese Americans in Rhode Island.

Bilingual education is not new. Various bilingual methods have been used throughout the world for many years. Some forms of bilingual education existed in the United States up to World War I, when they virtually disappeared from the public schools.

Then in the early 1960's bilingual education was revived. Mexican Americans had been pushing for some form of bilingual education for years before, but the first modern day English-Spanish program was started in Florida for Cuban immigrants after the Cuban revolution. This increased the interest in bilingual programs throughout the country. In late 1967, an important step was taken when Congress passed Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Title VII, also known as the Bilingual Education Act, provides Federal money for bilingual programs in many schools throughout the country.

The first bilingual programs for Mexican Americans were started in Texas, and scattered programs now exist in all five Southwestern States. For the fortunate few who are in true bilingual-bicultural classrooms, the experience is exciting and enriching.

One such bilingual program is at Bridge Street Elementary School in the predominantly Chicano area of East Los Angeles. The program there is in its fourth year and going strong.

The drab concrete exterior of the Bridge Street School building contrasts sharply with the bright, warm faces inside the classrooms. Along the walls on bulletin boards of the bilingual classes are posters reminding you that "A" stands for águila (eagle) as well as apple. An exhibit of heroes includes not only Washington and Lincoln but also Mexican patriots Juarez and Hidalgo and

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U.S. leaders of all ethnic groups. One child's display reports the "News of the Day" in English and another summarizes "Las Noticias del Dia" in Spanish.

A sense of commitment to bilingual education comes through in conversations with the school's teachers, principal Luis Salcido, and Title VII bilingual coordinator Marta Acosta. For years Mrs. Acosta felt frustrated by not being permitted to use Spanish in teaching Mexican Americans. Now she supervises bilingual-bicultural instruction at Bridge in kindergarten through fourth grade. With pride, Mrs. Acosta invites visitors to view the bilingual classes.

In one kindergarten, teacher Rita Cázares is about to begin her "magic circle" session. She and 10 pupils are clustered in a circle on the floor. Behind them, hanging on a string, is a rainbow of colorful student drawings.

"Today we are going to talk about what makes us feel very happy," Mrs. Cázares begins. "Hoy vamos hablar de algo que nos hace sentir muy feliz. . . . Who wants to be first?"

"I like to watch TV," Jenny says.

"Yo quiero un carro de carreras," Alfonso chimes in.

"I like swings," Sandra adds.

In turn, the students continue to volunteer answers. Which language they use is not important. Their expressions of thoughts and ideas are what matter. The goal is to develop the students' positive image of themselves. Pupils readily take part because they are talking about their ideas and feelings.

"The children's experiences are the curriculum," says Mrs. Acosta. "Use of their own language allows them to express themselves—their thoughts, wishes, and feelings."

Every few minutes, Mrs. Cázares has the children review what the others have said, encouraging them to listen carefully and aiding their awareness of others. Each student uses his own language and hears a second language in a meaningful situation . . . a method that allows the pupil to increase his bilingual skills.

Down the hall, third grade teacher Arturo Selva is dictating a letter in English to a dozen pupils. Earlier he had dictated a similar letter in Spanish to them.

In another part of this classroom, a Mexican American parent who serves as a teacher's aide gives individual attention in English reading to a pigtailed girl who speaks only Spanish at home. Other students, meanwhile, work by themselves, reading from English skills workbooks.

Then teacher Selva ends the group sessions and goes to the blackboard. He writes out the Spanish sentence "Adonde vas" and asks for a volunteer to punctuate it. Fifteen boys and girls raise their hands and wave them with enthusiasm saying, "I know, I know."

Selva calls on a girl of Japanese background who correctly places question marks at the beginning and end of the sentence and an accent on the "o".

Turning to the class, Selva asks, "¿Estan de acuerdo?" "Do you agree?" He then compares the accentuation of the Spanish "¿Adónde vas?" with the English "Where are you going?" Selva uses both languages to stress points, reinforce ideas, and introduce new concepts.

The bilingual technique continues throughout the day. Selva teaches all subject areas—including mathematics, history, and science—in both English and Spanish. Use of the two languages follows no hard and fast plan but develops naturally as teacher and students see fit. And

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more than that, the teacher increases student understanding and interest by drawing from experiences of two cultures to explain his points.

"We use examples and descriptions that will be familiar to the students," Selva says. "If I'm talking to my students about what one-half means, I give them a tortilla, have them cut it into two equal pieces and give a half to a classmate. Then they all understand what one-half means.

"Many of the hangups some students had about themselves have been erased," Selva says. "Last year we had a tough time convincing one boy that it was all right to speak Spanish. He thought there was something wrong with it. Now he's comfortable using it and is well on his way to becoming perfectly bilingual."

The majority of third graders in Selva's class are already reading considerably above the fourth grade level. Selva is confident that by the sixth grade, when the students' bilingual training is due to end, almost all will be reading above the sixth grade level in both English and Spanish.

Five of his students—four of them Mexican Americans—out of a class of 26 have been tested as "gifted" (IQ above 132). One girl moved into Selva's bilingual classroom and scored a below-average 33 on her September math test. In the State testing several months later, she came up with a near-perfect 58 out of 60.

"I'm able to establish a good relationship with the students because I speak their language and I know their culture," Selva explains. "I've lived in East L.A. most of my life and I am familiar with the community and the people. This facilitates my teaching and our community involvement.

"What these children need is a composite picture of themselves, not a jigsaw puzzle with parts missing. What bilingual-bicultural education does is to allow a child to say: 'I have a culture that is as beautiful as any other. Different is not wrong. I can speak two languages. Perhaps I can learn to speak three, four, five. I am proud of my heritage. I know I live differently. Isn't that nice?' "

Educators involved in Title VII programs consider community support important. People from the community serve on advisory boards that select bilingual teachers and make decisions on courses. Neighborhood adults are also used as aides and classroom volunteers. Many schools invite parents to workshops where teachers show how bilingual programs work.

When the Bridge Street School bilingual program was getting started, some parents were worried. One parent, María Ybarra, now a teacher's aide at Bridge, explains: "When I first learned about bilingual education for our children, I was against it because I felt that Mexican Americans had to learn English to do well in this society. But now that I have worked in this program and understand bilingual education, I see I was wrong. Our children are speaking better English and better Spanish than if they were in a regular English-only class. Estoy encantada. [I am delighted]."

Other parents quickly saw the benefits of bilingual instruction. One Mexican American mother drives her son in from another section of the city so that he can have a bilingual education. Having grown up in an Anglo neighborhood, the boy did not speak Spanish. Now he is gaining fluency and confidence in Spanish.

Yumi, a Japanese American girl in Selva's class, is driven to school by her parents, who live outside the school's boundaries. With district

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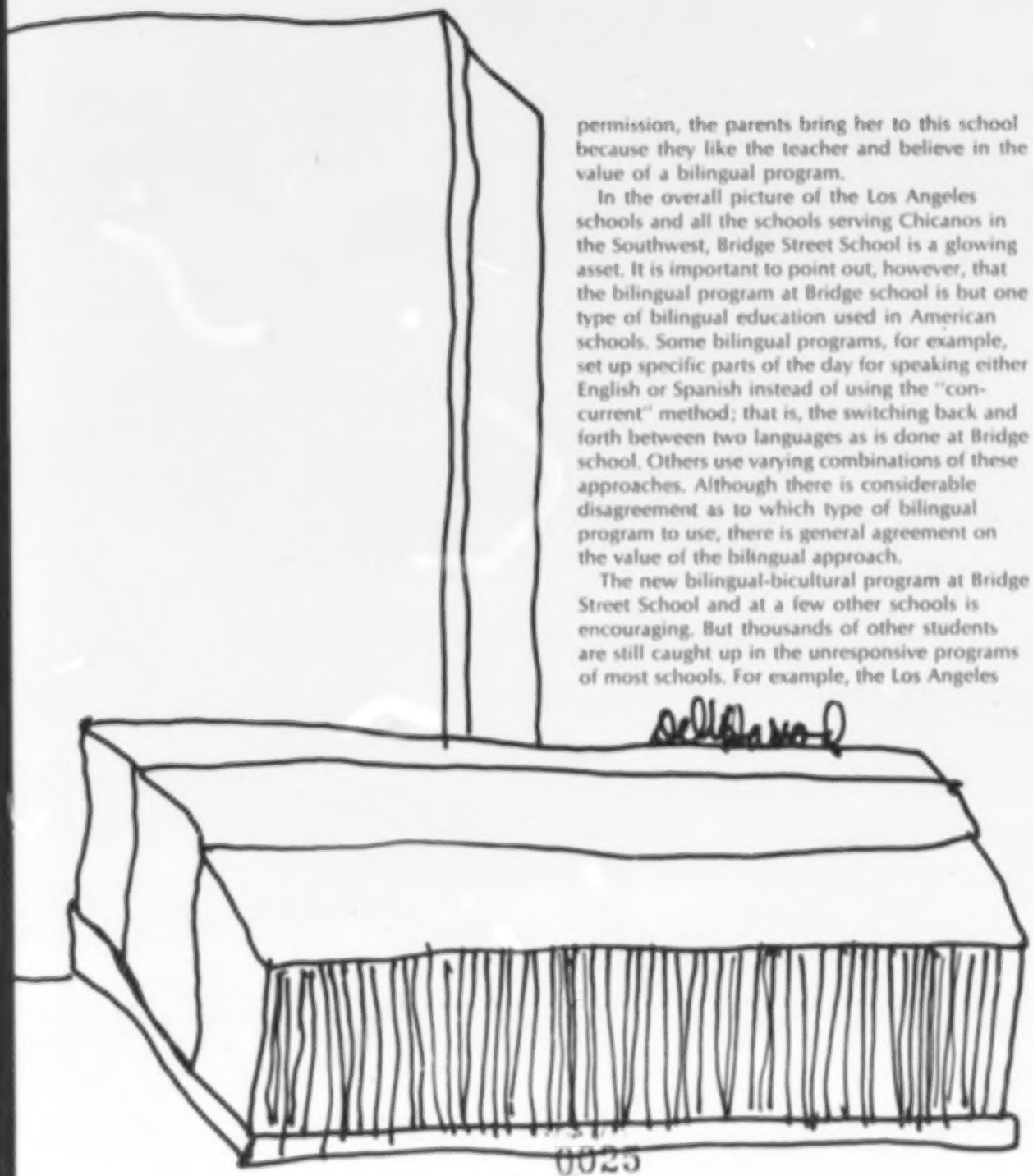


permission, the parents bring her to this school because they like the teacher and believe in the value of a bilingual program.

In the overall picture of the Los Angeles schools and all the schools serving Chicanos in the Southwest, Bridge Street School is a glowing asset. It is important to point out, however, that the bilingual program at Bridge school is but one type of bilingual education used in American schools. Some bilingual programs, for example, set up specific parts of the day for speaking either English or Spanish instead of using the "concurrent" method; that is, the switching back and forth between two languages as is done at Bridge school. Others use varying combinations of these approaches. Although there is considerable disagreement as to which type of bilingual program to use, there is general agreement on the value of the bilingual approach.

The new bilingual-bicultural program at Bridge Street School and at a few other schools is encouraging. But thousands of other students are still caught up in the unresponsive programs of most schools. For example, the Los Angeles

Unified School District is the second largest in the Nation and has the largest number of Chicano students. During 1973–74, this district included approximately 90,000 Mexican American students in elementary schools. However, Title VII bilingual programs included only about 1,850 students, or 2 percent. A small number of other Chicano students attended local- and State-funded bilingual programs.

In the Southwest as a whole, Title VII bilingual programs enroll about 4 percent of the 1.6 million Mexican American students. During the 1972–73 school year, 123 projects for Mexican Americans were funded, with about 70,000 students participating.

State funding for bilingual education has been limited and slow in coming. Of the five Southwestern States, only Texas starting in the 1974–75 school year will require bilingual education for Spanish speaking children. In contrast, Massachusetts, which has a much smaller Spanish speaking population than any of the Southwestern States, in 1972 became the first State to require bilingual programs for non-English-speaking children.

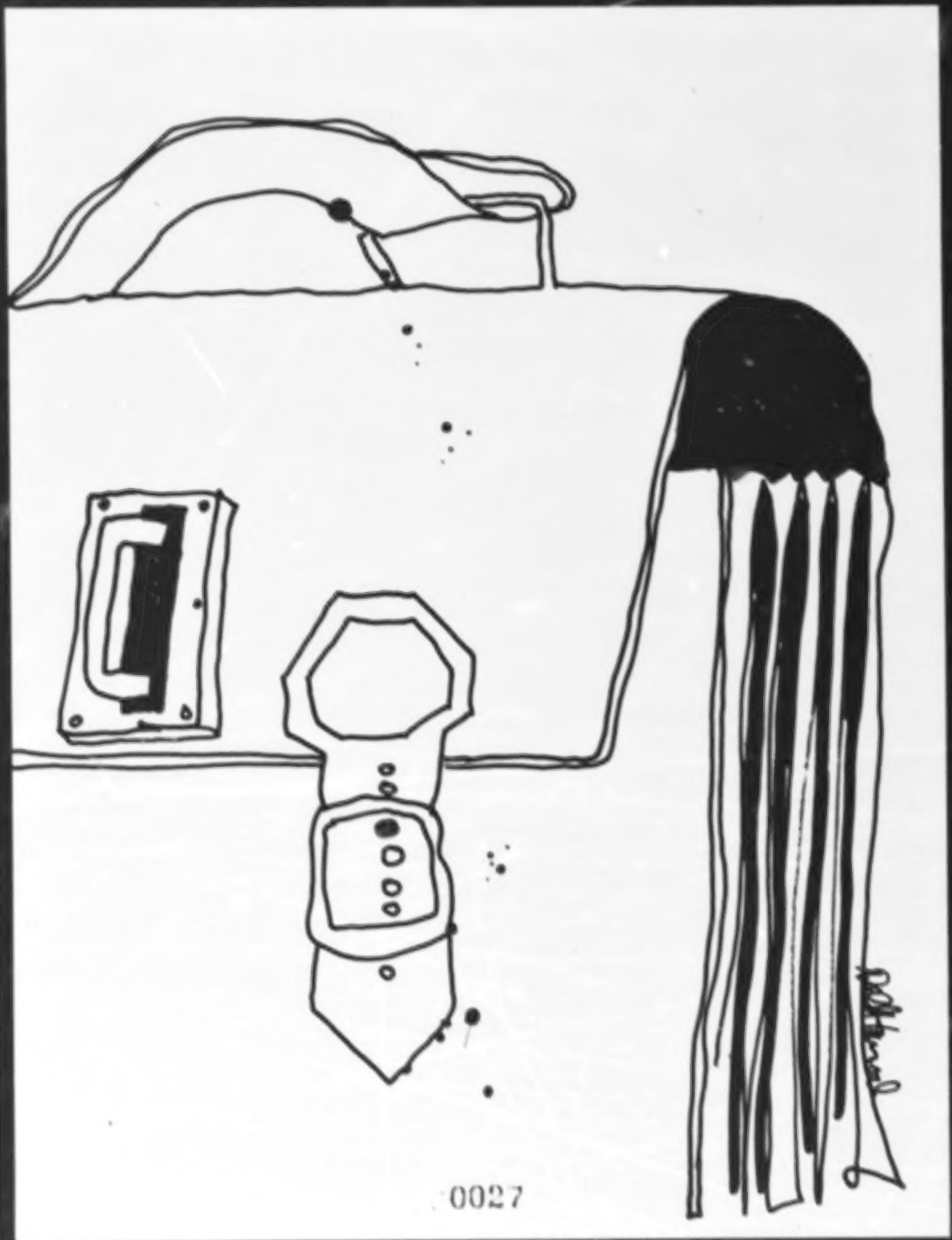
More Federal and State funds and more bilingual teachers will be needed before bilingual education can reach a significant number of Chicanos. So, for most Mexican Americans, bilingual education is a distant hope. But for Leticia Prieto, a third grader at the Bridge Street School, bilingualism is here and she knows its value. She wrote the following with the rich excitement and imagination of an 8-year-old:

"How It Feels To Be Bilingual"

One day I was walking down the street suddenly I thought if I could go to the beach. So I went. Then I saw a castle. Then I went inside the castle I saw a giant crying. Then I said, What happened?

The giant said I want to speak bilingual. Well that's simple I'll teach you. The giant said, When do we start? I said Right now. So we went on until the night. The giant said, si means yes. I said now you know how to speak bilingual. The giant said, I love to speak bilingual so much.

The next day I told my mother how it feels to speak bilingual. Well it feels good. It feels like I speak all kinds of languages.



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CONCLUSION: ¡SI SE PUEDE!

When change is needed, the educational system is better known for caution than for quick action.

As early as 1940 George I. Sánchez, a noted scholar and educator, described the deficiencies of Southwestern schools in relating to Mexican American students. In 1971, a year before his death, Dr. Sánchez looked back at the Mexican American movement for educational reform and concluded:

> While I have seen some changes and improvements in this long-standing dismal picture, I cannot . . . take any satisfaction in those developments. The picture is a shameful and embarrassing one.

Time moves on. But relatively few school improvements occur for the largest minority group in the Southwest. While educators and officials have debated why Juanito can't read, generations of Mexican Americans have been doomed to school failure. Forty percent of Chicano students drop out of schools, but most school districts continue business as usual.

Today, for the most part, the language and culture of Mexican Americans are still excluded from the classroom, and the Chicano heritage is omitted in textbooks and course work. Teachers and counselors, most of whom are Anglo, are not trained to work effectively with Mexican American children. Schools put larger numbers of Chicano children in low ability classes instead of starting effective learning programs. Reforms are overdue.

Mexican American parents are ready to help, but schools must show more initiative in getting their assistance and in using it, especially in the making of school policy. If the system is not ready to listen, Chicanos will have to take their cases to their elected officials—or, in some

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instances, to the courts. Encouragement for such action has been provided by the January 1974 unanimous Supreme Court decision in a San Francisco case involving Chinese American students. The court ruled that a school system receiving Federal funds violates the law when it fails to meet the needs of non-English-speaking children.

What Chicano students want is a fair break—an equal chance to get a quality education. But they also want to feel proud of who they are. America is a land enriched by different ethnic groups, and Mexican Americans do not believe they should have to give up their identity to enjoy success in school.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, in the final report of its Mexican American Education Study, made many recommendations to improve the quality of education offered to Chicanos. These recommendations in brief, stress that:

- The language and culture of Mexican Americans should be a basic part of the educational process.
- Mexican Americans should be fully represented in educational decisionmaking at all levels.
- Federal, State, and local governments should provide sufficient funds to reach these goals.

Whether these recommendations are followed or ignored depends on people in the educational system—superintendents, principals, teachers. It also depends on State and Federal government agencies that are involved in these programs and provide policy guidelines.

The Mexican American community has taken up a slogan that spurs forward its movement for equality in American life: ¡Sí Se Puede!—It can be done! It can be done, but will it be done for the Chicano child? That is a question to which American society must provide a positive response.

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Reports of the Mexican American Education Study

Ethnic Isolation of Mexican Americans in the Southwest. Report I. 1971. 110 pp. Documents the separation of Mexican American students in schools and school districts throughout the Southwest and the underrepresentation of Mexican Americans among school personnel.

The Unfinished Education. Report II. 1971. 107 pp. Examines the failure of schools to educate Mexican American students as measured by reading achievement, school dropouts, grade repetition, etc.

The Excluded Student. Report III. 1972. 89 pp. Reports on the denial of equal educational opportunity to Mexican American students as shown by the exclusion from the schools of Mexican American language, culture, and community participation.

Mexican American Education in Texas: A Function of Wealth. Report IV. 1972. 53 pp. Examines the ways the Texas school finance system works to the detriment of districts in which Mexican American students are concentrated.

Teachers and Students: Differences in Teacher Interaction with Mexican American and Anglo Students. Report V. 1973. 68 pp. Describes how teachers neglect Mexican American students in favor of Anglo students in the course of daily teaching.

Toward Quality Education for Mexican Americans. Report VI. 1974. 98 pp. Focuses on specific problems in the education of Mexican American children and recommends actions at various governmental and educational levels which may lead to solutions of these problems.

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